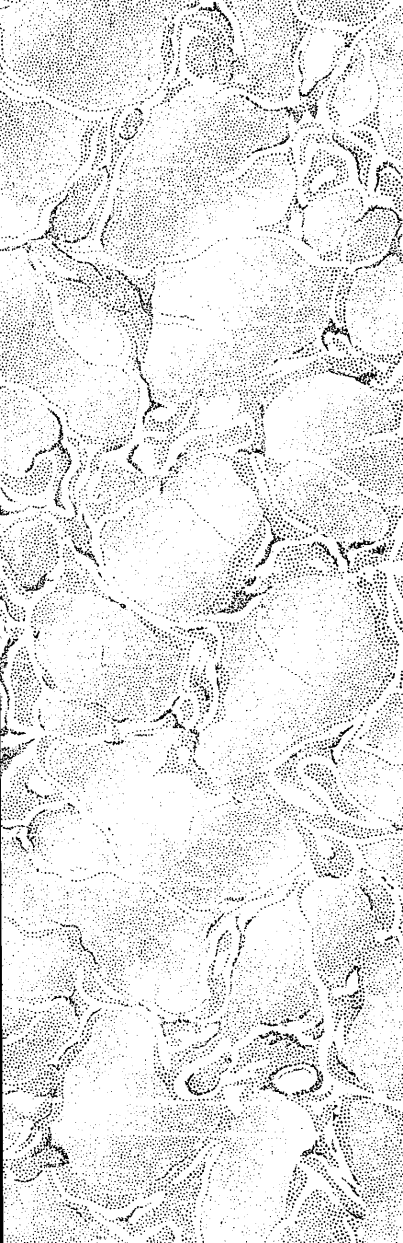


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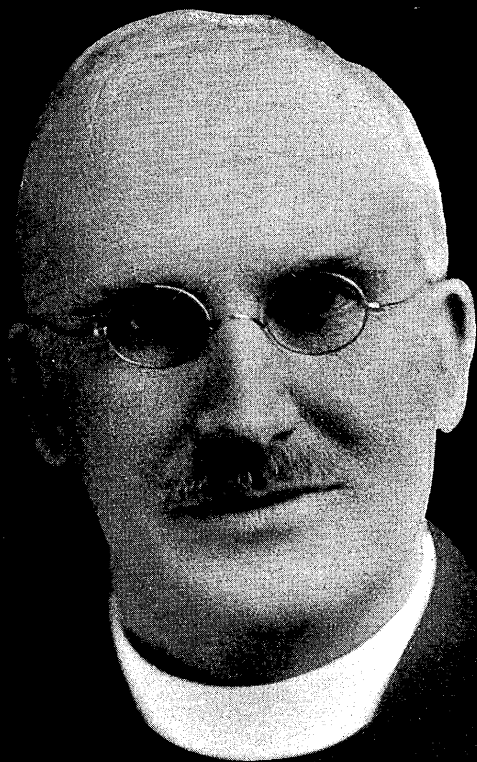




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# MASON *of* KWANGCHOW





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BY

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EDITORIAL SECRETARY CHINA INLAND MISSION

THE CHINA INLAND MISSION

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## WHY THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN

SOMETHING must be written, however briefly and inadequately. Herbert John Mason was a man of sterling goodness and a notable missionary. But there have been many missionaries in the China Inland Mission with similar qualities whose lives have never been written or published. Some of these have been more widely known in England than Mr. Mason, and yet it has been found impossible—partly because there are so many who are really worthy of it—to produce any record of their lives. But of Herbert Mason, we repeat, something *must* be written.

Firstly, because the spirit of the man and his attitude to the Chinese were exactly such as should characterise every missionary from Western lands in seeking to present the Gospel to men of another race. He seemed to possess just those qualities which are essential at this particular juncture for successful co-operation with the Chinese Church in the evangelisation of the Chinese people.

And, secondly, because the methods by which he was used of God to build up a self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing Church in one single district (that of Kwangchow in Honan) are

exactly those which the China Inland Mission desires all its members to adopt in every district and province of China.

This is the justification, if any be needed, for the following brief sketch of Mr. Mason's life and work. He is the type of man, and his methods are the surest methods, for the evangelisation of the new China which is slowly emerging from the ruins of the old. May God give us, as a Mission, men like him to accomplish work like his! He would desire no tribute to his memory, but we write with the fervent prayer that his zeal may provoke very many.

His life falls naturally into two periods:

(1) The Preparation for Kwangchow.

(a) 1871-1891. In England.

(b) 1891-1913. In China.

(2) Kwangchow and After.

(a) 1913-1925. Kwangchow.

(b) 1925-1927. After Kwangchow.

F. H.

CHINA INLAND MISSION.

*March 28, 1929.*

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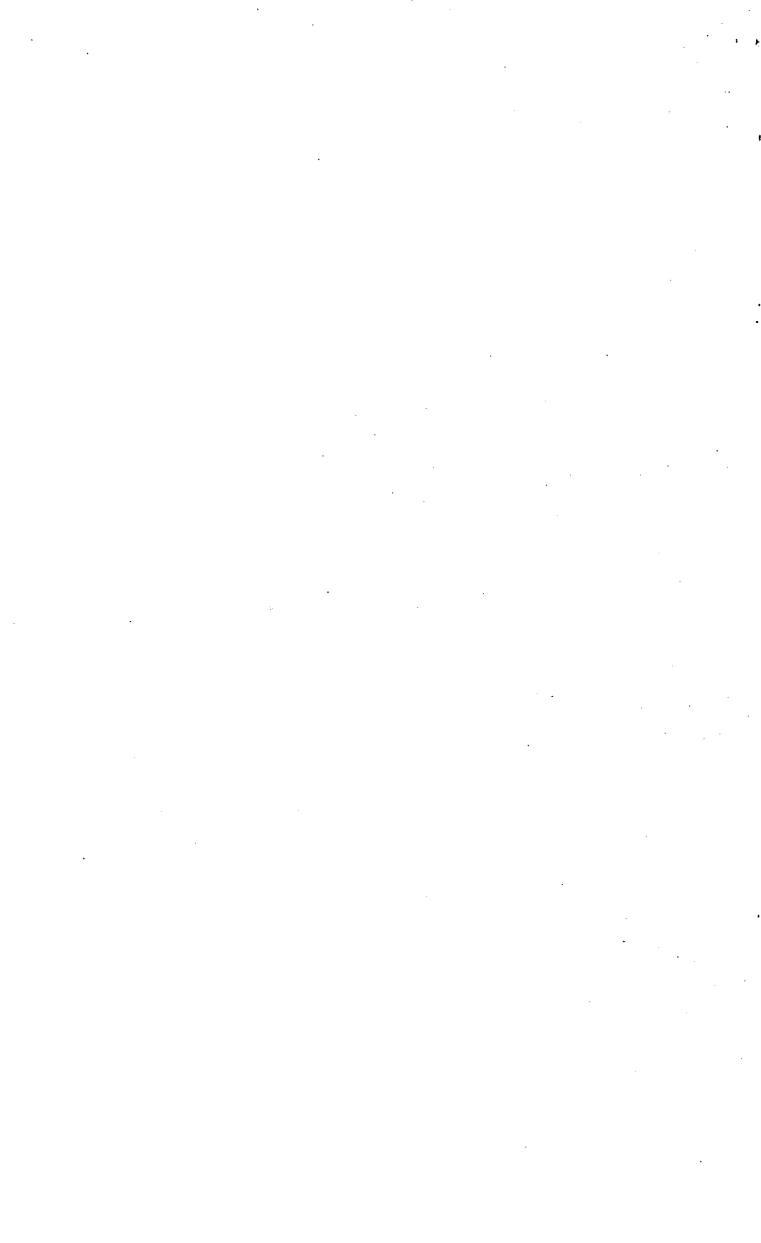


## PART I

### THE PREPARATION FOR KWANGCHOW

(a) 1871-1891. IN ENGLAND.

(b) 1891-1913. IN CHINA.



**EXTRACTS FROM MASON'S EARLY  
LETTERS TO HIS MOTHER**

*From Kansu, November, 1894 :*

*"I am learning that secret of sweet contentment  
in God's Will that I knew so little about in England."*

\* \* \* \* \*

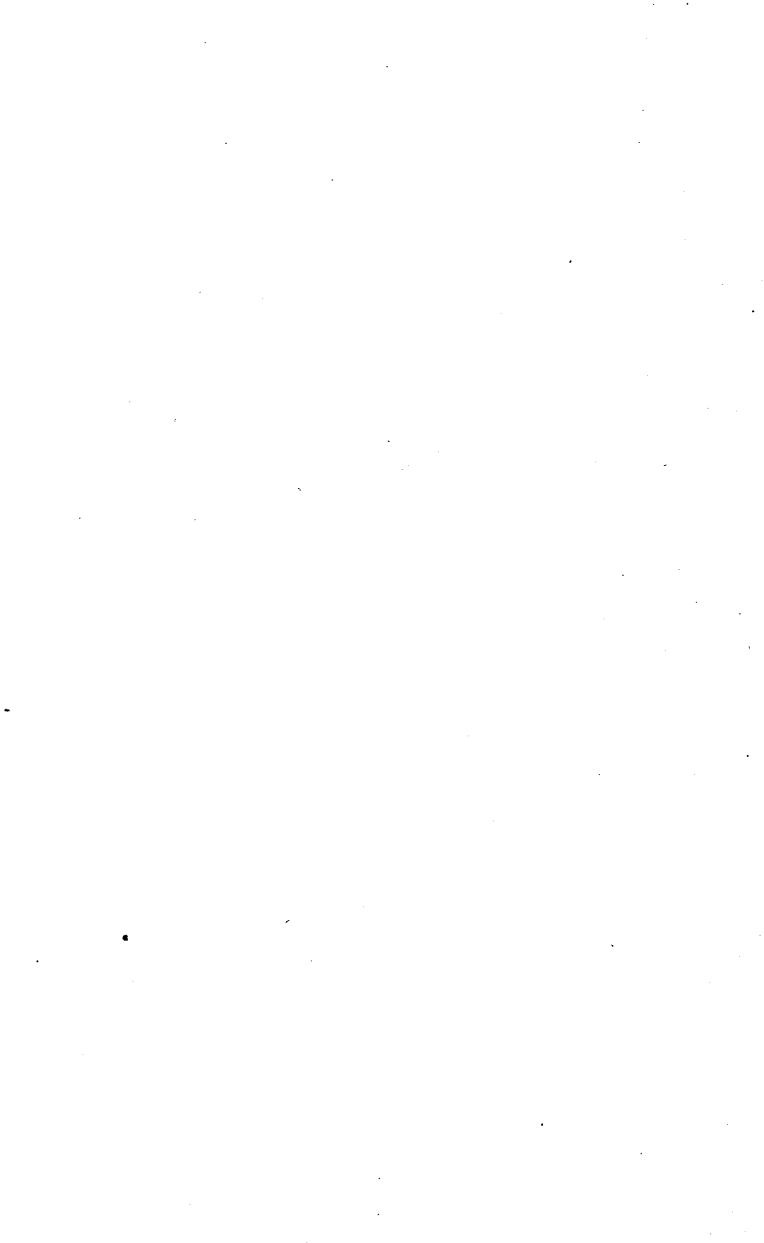
*From Kansu, 1896 :*

*"Some people have asked me why I am so silly  
as to bury myself in this extreme corner of the earth,  
while to me it seems as though my coming to China  
has given me the life more abundant."*

\* \* \* \* \*

*"Just when we are unable to do anything He  
does everything."*





## CHAPTER I

### IN ENGLAND

GOD leads us sometimes along the line of our inclinations, of our natural aptitudes and desires. Amongst the thousands of young men who joined the army in 1914, there were many who, in any case, would have become professional soldiers because the life appealed to them. But of those who obeyed the call of duty and patriotism, there were surely many who had no sort of inclination for the task, for whom duty and inclination beckoned in opposite directions. They were not born soldiers, and their sacrifice was all the greater for that reason.

Similarly there are missionaries who, if they had never heard God's call, would, at any rate, have travelled all over the world if the opportunity was given them, who would have met with adventure because they courted it. But there are others, many others, who, if they followed their inclinations merely, would have been perfectly content to live and die in England, whose love of home is stronger than any other attachment, who go because they must, finding perfect joy in doing the Will of God, yet with no natural desire supporting their

sense of Divine call. It was to this latter class that Herbert Mason belonged. "I should never have left my native land," he used to say, "except for the sake of the Gospel."

He was born in the village of Houghton, near Huntingdon, on September 15th, 1871, and to him that village—the green with its pump, the village shop, the blacksmith's forge, and a huge spreading chestnut tree, the great Ouse flowing beneath a three-storeyed wooden mill, and a large meadow beyond—was always the ideal village, the most beautiful place in the world.

The seventh of a family of ten, he lived a happy, healthy life, going to school first in the village and then at Huntingdon, three miles away. At the age of seventeen he became a solicitor's clerk in an uncle's office at Wakefield, and it was through the influence and prayers of one or two friends in that city, young men like himself, that in 1889 he met with God, and became consciously a new man in Christ. Letters written in China some years later show something of his early experiences, and how, unknown to anyone, God was already drawing him with cords of love.

Nearly fourteen years after his arrival in China, Mr. Mason wrote to his fiancée:

"I should just like this morning to take you to my own little village chapel at Houghton. How I love that place, and remember as a boy during its

services having intense longings to serve Jesus and to love Him. I often wanted to cry as I heard the Gospel story of Christ's sufferings read, but was always too proud, though I remember on several occasions being overcome, and then I used to vow I would be a preacher. I was only eighteen when I occupied that pulpit for the first time, and even now I can see the look of joy on my dear Mother's face, as I came out of the Preacher's Vestry. It must be a joy unknown to others, when parents see their children growing up Christian men and women."

In another letter he wrote:

"I can say truly now, 'To me to live is Christ. This text, I remember, used to be over the fireplace in our bedroom, and even before I left home for Wakefield I used to wonder and wonder whatever those words meant. Praise God, I know to-day!'"

It was impossible for him to know Christ without witnessing for Him, and it was not long before he found all his spare time occupied in open-air preaching, Sunday School work, conducting a Band of Hope, acting as Local Preacher and Assistant Secretary to the Church, visiting the workhouse, etc.—all in connection with the United Methodist Free Church, of which he was a member. So acceptable was he as a preacher and so whole-hearted in his consecration to God's service, that his Pastor fully expected to introduce him into the Methodist ministry, and he actually refused calls to at least two Churches.

But all through those quiet, uneventful years of steady application in his profession, and latterly of definite service for Christ, God had been preparing him to exchange the pleasant English country-side, where most of his life had been spent, for a land where everything—hills and valleys, plains and rivers—is on a much grander scale; to leave the routine work of a solicitor's office, and all the activities centring round the United Methodist Church at Wakefield, for a task which would demand all the powers with which God had endowed him, and which the discipline of everyday life was already developing. He was "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord," and it is such men whom Christ thrusts forth, putting them to more exacting tasks, showing them how great things they must suffer for His Name's sake.

At the Wakefield Convention of September, 1890, two young men (one of them Mr. H. F. Ridley, then Secretary of the Wakefield Y.M.C.A., who has ever since been at work in Kansu and beyond, and more recently in Sinkiang) were commended to God in prayer on the eve of sailing for China. Then and there the question presented itself to young Mason, "Does God want *me* in China?" The impression was deepened by a visit from Mr. A. Orr-Ewing, but it was the reading of "In the Far East," by Geraldine Guinness (Mrs. Howard Taylor), which finally convinced him that

the voice which he had heard was the voice of God.

And so it came to pass that in April, 1891, he offered to the China Inland Mission, and in the same year, when he was barely twenty years of age, he sailed for China, the youngest in a party of nine recruits.

A letter written from Kansu in 1894 shows that the farewells were not easy.

“In looking back,” he says, “it does not look three years ago since I stood on the G.N.R. platform at Huntingdon with Father and Agnes awaiting the half-past four train from Doncaster which was to carry me to London. No one ever knew how much I went through that day, nor does anyone know how very real was the Holy Spirit’s help.”

The first part of the preparation for Kwangchow was over.



## CHAPTER II

### IN CHINA

PROBABLY no young missionary of the China Inland Mission has ever landed in China without being impressed with the warmth of the welcome which he receives from older missionaries and members of the staff at Shanghai. The advent of reinforcements is always a cause for thanksgiving, and the Mission Home in Shanghai is proverbially a place where God's servants are sent forward on their journey after a godly sort. The new arrivals were welcomed by over thirty missionaries who happened to be in Shanghai at the time, including the Rev. J. H. Horsburgh, the leader of the first C.M.S. party to Szechwan; Miss Geraldine Guinness, whose book had stirred Mason to offer to the Mission; and Mr. Hudson Taylor himself. The nine young men who were ushered into Mr. Hudson Taylor's office that day listened for two hours as their leader told them of China and the Mission, and of God. It happened to be a time when funds were very low, and thus early they were called to practise what they had accepted in principle when they joined the Mission—faith in God for the supply of every need. "There are plenty of ravens in China"



said Hudson Taylor, "and God can use them to feed you as He fed Elijah."

After a brief stay in Shanghai—long enough to effect the necessary transformation from English to Chinese dress, including, of course, the pigtail—the party started on their journey for Anking on the Yangtse, the capital city of the province of Anhwei, and the site, since 1886, of the C.I.M. Men's Training Home. As far as the study of the language and adaptation to the Chinese climate and to Chinese ways were concerned, Mason, of course, had youth in his favour, but his rapid progress in these directions was due also to the completeness of his consecration, and his readiness to become to the Chinese as a Chinese that he might gain the more. The friend who told him that he was getting "far too Chinesy" was paying him an unintentional compliment, for the words imply that he was in the noble succession of all great missionaries from the Apostle Paul downwards.

His letters tell of early attempts to stammer out a few words in the unfamiliar tongue. Within five months of his arrival he was taking morning prayers in Chinese, and was encouraged by the fact that his hearers seemed to understand all he said! To him, as to many another before and since, the period in the Training Home was a time of testing. After living a full life of busy service for Christ, finding his chief joy in making Him known, the new

missionary suddenly becomes dumb, unable to utter a word for his Master, though living for the first time among those who have never heard His Name, and whose need becomes daily more apparent. But in Mason's case the insidious assaults of the enemy were unsuccessful, and the months of language study were months of blessing, of a deeper conviction of sin, and a fuller surrender to Christ.

Already he had come in close contact with the results of opium-smoking, for it was no uncommon thing for Chinese of both sexes in a fit of passion to attempt suicide by taking an overdose of the drug; and young students, though scarcely able to speak Chinese, could at least administer the proper remedies. But when, having earned the gratitude of the would-be suicide's friends by saving his life, he ventured to point the moral and urge them all to have nothing to do with opium, he was quietly reminded that England was responsible for forcing China to permit the traffic to continue.

Mason's language studies were interrupted by a call to Hankow to nurse a sick missionary there and when the missionary (Mr. Walter B. Sloan) recovered, Mason was retained there for business work until the end of August, 1892. When he reached Shanghai after the summer, the question was raised whether, in view of his experience in England and his proved efficiency at Hankow, it might be

right for him to remain at headquarters as secretary to the Director. From the human point of view it was an attractive proposal, but his heart was set on taking a direct share in the evangelisation of inland China, and shortly after his twenty-first birthday he began the long journey to Ninghsia in the remote province of Kansu.

At Tientsin he had the joy of meeting Mr. Ridley, who had travelled from Ninghsia to meet him. Although in his letters home he made light of the hardships of the way, it was by no means an easy journey for one who naturally lacked the spirit of adventure. As they crossed the Mongolian desert on the last stage of the journey, they missed their way, and for two days and three nights were entirely without food or water. Almost harder to bear than the raging thirst was the bitter cold, the temperature being forty degrees below zero. Yet it is interesting to note that during the following summer he crossed the desert again, and spent some time preaching at Kweihwa, a C.I.M. station in Inner Mongolia.

“I arrived safely here,” he says, “after sixteen days’ travel through Mongolia. . . . I am so happy and full of work, preaching every day and each night this week. We have had souls given us. Last night five Chinese asked to be prayed with. Glory be to God! We are going to win the Chinese to Jesus.”

With such results no wonder the hardships of the road were forgotten.

Apart from a furlough in England, Mason was at work in Kansu from 1892 to 1905, for one year at Ninghsia and for the remainder of the time at Lanchow, the provincial capital. Ninghsia was the most isolated station of the Mission, cut off from the rest of the world by desert, but with a fruitful plain round the city watered by the Yellow River. It has never been an easy station. As a result of Mr. Horobin's work, there were seven or eight believers in 1893; but even to-day, after the work has continued for over forty years, there are only twenty-four communicants. Ninghsia has yet to see an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which will result in a wide ingathering of souls. *Who will pray for Ninghsia?*

But Mason was happy in the work. He had the joy of seeing some turn to God, one of whom was a prodigal from another town, who later on became a useful evangelist. Cases of opium poisoning were frequent, over three hundred in one year, and the following is typical of many extracts from the young missionary's diary:

"In the early hours of the morning (about 2 o'clock) I heard a great row at our gate, and I got up and told our man to go out and see what was the matter. It was the now familiar story to my ears—that a woman, in order to end her miserable exist-

ence, had swallowed a large quantity of opium, and they had come to beseech the 'foreign doctor' to go and save her life. I was quickly dressed (but it's cold getting out these nights), as I am in charge of the opium business. It was a beautiful night, such as we only see out here in the Far East.

"On arrival at the house it turned out to be my teacher's wife, and as usual they had tried their native methods before coming to me, but without avail. The poor woman was suffering intense pain through her folly, which she now bitterly regretted, and the damnable stuff was fast doing its deadly work. What made it worse was, the woman was not far from her confinement, and I had great difficulty in causing her to vomit the opium, but after some time I was rewarded, and she threw the opium all up, and her life was saved by God's grace!

"This morning I learn that her husband is a very bad man, and had been abusing her. She was a very nice-looking woman, and was but eighteen years old. All the time I was there she was calling out most piteously, 'Oh, my Mother, my Mother! My heart is in agony because of my sins.' After I got back to bed at 4.30 these words rang in my ears and drove sleep from me, and I couldn't help while lying on my brick 'kang' thanking God that He had revealed His wondrous grace to me."

At one time funds were delayed in reaching the station, and the missionaries' supply of cash grew less and less. Of course, no one in the city knew of

their plight, but one day, as they were praying in Mr. Horobin's study, the door slowly opened, and a man who was regarded as one of the most niggardly members of the Church thrust his head in with the words, "The Lord tells me to give you this," at the same time throwing two strings of cash on to the floor. They prayed in English, God answered in Chinese.

All through the twelve years at Lanchow Mason grew in his knowledge and appreciation of the Chinese people. It was always the love of Christ which constrained him, but he became more and more one with the people around him, anxious in every possible way to avoid giving them offence, and in non-essentials to be ready to conform to their ideas. His attitude was appreciated by the people, and thus he gained a hearing for the Gospel. The open cursing which used to greet him when he first attempted to preach in the city gave way to interest and friendliness, and he had the privilege of seeing the little Church grow.

During the Moslem rebellion of 1895 he was detained for some time at Liangchow, because the rebels held the road to Lanchow. The Imperial General excused himself from attacking them on the ground that "the guns get so hot in the warm weather"! Mason returned to find the city full of refugees, and for three months he spent his mornings in seeking to reach them with the Gospel.

His work brought him into touch with the highest officials as well as the poorer classes. A new Viceroy named Tao came to the city in 1896, and after some time sent word to Mason that he would be glad to see him.

“ I called upon him, and in course of conversation he told me that one thing he had heard about me had struck him as passing strange. He said, ‘ It has been told me that when preaching in the open air the Chinese are accustomed to curse you, calling you ‘ Foreign Devil,’ and that you had not been known to retaliate.’ He asked me how, as a young man, I was able to so control my feelings, and was seemingly very surprised at my explanation.

“ Not long afterwards I was hastily summoned to the Viceroy’s residence, and found him in deep sorrow. His only son, a young man of real promise, was apparently dying from hæmorrhage of the lungs. I protested that I was not a doctor, but he pleaded that I might do something for him, saying he knew I had helped many poor people in the city. I said I believed in prayer to God, and if he would kneel with me we would pray together. We did so, and on rising from our knees my eye lighted on a bunch of keys hanging on the wall. These I hastily stuffed down the patient’s back, and blew tannin powder up the nostrils. In a few minutes he opened his eyes, and asked me if I were Mr. Mason. The Viceroy himself took this as an answer to prayer, and in a very short time the patient recovered. We became friends, and I was privileged

on many occasions to take a meal with the Viceroy and his son and Chief Secretary.

"I gave him a Bible which at subsequent conversations I could tell he was reading. One day, on speaking of the Bible, the Viceroy said to me, 'Do you really believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead as your Bible says He did? That's the most wonderful thing in your Scriptures.'

"Soon after this the son, who was a member of the Reform Party, was sent for to Peking by the Empress Dowager, but the Father told me he should not let him go; and it will be remembered how many of the leading members of that Party who accepted the Empress's invitation to help her in the government were, by her own orders, put to death. The Viceroy's son was thus saved this cruel fate.

"When leaving Lanchow for furlough in 1899 I went to say goodbye. The Viceroy took me by the hand, and, leading me to his garden, ordered all his attendants to leave us, and when quite alone he whispered to me, 'I am so glad you are going to England. Don't hurry back before another two years, something unspeakable will happen in China. I cannot say more.' The day I left the city His Excellency came in person to the Mission House to say goodbye and wish me, in the delightfully polite way of the Chinese, a happy time in the old home. On my return to Lanchow two years later I learned from the Viceroy's Secretary, who had become the Lanchow Taotai, how Mr. Tao had laboured to save the lives of every missionary in Shensi and Kansu, sending out strictest orders to every official to offer protection and, if needs be, sustenance.



In Sianfu, whither the Empress Dowager had fled, he openly rebuked the Military party, and warned the Empress Dowager, and it was he who stood by and advised Tuan Fang, the acting Governor of Shensi, in all his difficulties. It will be remembered not one life was lost in Shensi or Kansu."

Returning from furlough in 1902, Mason was again designated to Lanchow. This time he travelled up river by houseboat, and, passing through the province of Honan, spent three days at Kingtzekwan. Here he met not only Mr. George Parker, the pioneer missionary who had opened the city of Lanchow to the Gospel,\* but his eldest daughter. It was a case of love at first sight, and in 1905 they were married at Hankow by the veteran missionary Dr. Griffith John. Mrs. Mason proved to be exactly the helpmeet he needed.

For the next eight years, with an interval for furlough, Mr. and Mrs. Mason were stationed at Kingtzekwan. They rented a house for the equivalent of £1 per annum in a village near by, and continued steadily preaching the Word. It is a somewhat out-of-the-way place, and in 1906 Mrs. Mason reported that she was beginning

\* Mr. and Mrs. George Parker are still (1929) at Kingtzekwan. They are now the senior missionaries of the C.I.M. actually at work on the field. Mr. Parker joined the Mission in 1876.

to teach some women to read, an accomplishment to which so far no woman in the city had attained !

But the time of preparation at length drew to a close. In October, 1913, the Masons arrived at Kwangchow, Honan.



**PART II**

**KWANGCHOW AND AFTER**

*(a)* 1913-1925. KWANGCHOW.

*(b)* 1925-1927. AFTER KWANGCHOW.



*Quoted in a letter written by Mason at Nanking,  
April, 1892 :*

*"REST" ?*

*" Not now, for I have wanderers in the distance,  
And thou must call them in with patient love.  
Not now, for I have sheep upon the mountains,  
And thou must follow them where'er they rove."*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*From a letter written at Kwangchow, 1919 :*

*" Love is still the most wonderful thing in the  
world."*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*From a letter written by Mr. D. E. Hoste, General  
Director of the C.I.M., to Mrs. Mason after her  
husband's death :*

*" I had long known and admired him as a more  
than ordinarily devoted and gifted servant of Christ  
and member of the Mission, and these feelings  
deepened as I got to know him more closely and to  
observe his courage and manliness under the pro-  
longed heavy trial of pain and illness, and also to  
observe his godliness of character and his wisdom  
enriched by a rich and unusual experience of pastoral  
service amongst the Chinese. He will be mourned  
by many and his memory will be cherished. His  
name will stand on the roll of those who have main-  
tained the cause for which the Mission exists, and  
who have finished their course."*



## CHAPTER III

### KWANGCHOW

IN the south-east corner of the province of Honan, the centre of a rich rice-growing district with a population of about two million people, lies the city of Kwangchow ("City of Light"). Thither in 1899 came a young Italian named Argento, who, from 1896, had been a member of the China Inland Mission. For twenty-two days he lived in an inn just outside the city, holding meetings twice daily in addition to preaching in the open air.

Within a month after he had been successful in renting a house, there was a score of really earnest enquirers who met with him day by day for worship. The Chinese officials were friendly, and Mr. Argento was full of confidence. Early in 1900, the year of the Boxer Rising, he reported the baptism of the first convert, and several others had been added to the Church when in July the storm clouds which had already broken over the Northern provinces of China suddenly threatened Kwangchow. On July 8th the Mission premises were rioted, and Mr. Argento himself was cruelly beaten. The rioters even poured kerosene oil over him and set it alight. But for the intervention of friendly



neighbours he would have been burnt to death. For two days he remained unconscious, the Christians lovingly tending him, but when it was discovered that he had not succumbed the magistrate sent him north in a bamboo stretcher with an escort of soldiers. A few days later he was brought back to the city, but the mob still thirsted for his blood, and finally his escort took him some miles in the direction of Hankow and then abandoned him. Destitute of money and clothes, and suffering from severe wounds, he reached Hankow on July 31st, and thus ended the first chapter in the history of the Kwangchow Church.

\* \* \* \* \*

But a good foundation had been laid. The believers faced bitter persecution and stood the test nobly. Amongst them was Mr. Tan, a bamboo worker. He was a delicate man, suffering from malaria, but when the day for his baptism came and the river was frozen over, he did not flinch. The ice was broken, he was baptised, and he testifies that he has never had an attack of malaria since !

Then there was Mr. Wen, a man of education, who had a position in the Yamen. He had lost his wife and made a very unhappy second marriage. To drown his grief he began to smoke opium, and gradually became more and more a slave to the drug. One day he picked up a torn piece of paper

(part of a Gospel) on which were printed the two Chinese characters for Jesus—"Ye-su." On consulting the standard dictionary compiled by the great Emperor Kang-hsi, he found that this Jesus was said by Westerners to be the "Saviour of the World." Immediately his heart responded, "If there is a Saviour of the world, I need Him!" It was about this time that Mr. Argento came to the city, and one evening Mr. Wen ventured to go to the Mission house, and heard Mr. Argento sing the hymn,

*"What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the Blood of Jesus."*

He wept as he listened, and from that time his heart was open to receive the Gospel. When the Christians were dragged before the magistrate, and Tan had fearlessly testified to Christ, the magistrate, furious but nonplussed, asked if there was no educated man amongst the Christians, and Mr. Wen was immediately brought along. His diplomatic reference to Kang-hsi's dictionary caused the collapse of the prosecution, and during the long absence of the missionary the believers continued to meet daily for worship.

Mr. Argento returned in 1902, and for the next six years laboured fervently in the Gospel. But his health had been undermined by the sufferings of the Boxer year, and in 1908 he was forced to retire, leaving Mr. Wen as elder of the Church.

From 1908 to 1913 there was no resident missionary at Kwangchow, though when Mr. Argento left there were over three hundred Christians in the city and the seven out-stations. Already they were showing the zeal and generosity in the support of the work which have ever since been their distinguishing characteristics. They had been, to some extent, self-supporting and self-propagating—now they were forced to make experiments in self-government. And meanwhile, right on till his death in 1917, Mr. Argento was spending his last years in prayer for the Church and district. In spite of setbacks the Church grew. Its roots went deeper down into God. "These people," said a visiting missionary in 1911, "have learnt to pray. Their Sunday morning prayer meeting begins at 4 o'clock and lasts two hours. They have gone great lengths with God."

At one time the landlord evicted them from the Mission property, and for many months a group of Christians met before daylight in the deep shadows of the gateway in the city wall, and cried to God for a place of worship. There was a certain compound which would have suited their purpose admirably, but the price was far more than they were able to pay. As they prayed God worked. The son of the owner of the property came into contact with Christians in Shanghai, and wrote home to his father urging him to sell the property to the

Kwangchow Christians at half-price. Joyfully they took possession, and many of the women willingly offered silver bangles and hair ornaments to be sold for the renovation of the buildings. Thus, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the Churches were multiplied.

\* \* \* \* \*

And so in October, 1913, Mason entered on the work for which his whole life, both in England and in China, had been a preparation. He found at Kwangchow a living, growing company of believers, practically forced to support their own work and to manage their own affairs, because for years they had had no resident missionaries. What attitude should Mr. and Mrs. Mason adopt? As they travelled through the district and became acquainted with the needs of the work, they might have written to headquarters in Shanghai appealing for funds to erect Churches, to support evangelists and Bible women, and to open schools, and doubtless they would have been, in some degree, successful. Money would have been forthcoming. Moreover, as they noted the mistakes into which the Chinese leaders had fallen through inexperience, as they became aware of what they felt to be deficiencies in the work, faulty methods, customs and practices unusual in Western lands, they might have hastened to put things right (from their point

of view), they might have expressed themselves so strongly as to silence all objections. And again they would have been successful. The Chinese leaders would probably have submitted to the dictation of the missionary, and admitted that the foreigners knew best.

But Mason saw that in so acting he would have done irreparable injury to the Chinese Church. He would have fostered a spirit of dependence, so that whenever money was needed application would have been made to him. And if there was money in Shanghai, why should the Christians deny themselves to supply it? And he would have killed initiative in the leaders. If they feared his rebuke, if they found him determined to have things done in his own way, they would have ceased to take the initiative. Their views would gradually become mere echoes of his views. If a serious clash occurred, they would probably have refused to take office or to undertake any responsibility.

The phenomenal progress of the work in the Kwangchow district during the next few years was due under God to the patience and restraint, the self-effacing leadership, of Herbert Mason. When he arrived in 1913 there were eight out-stations in connection with the parent Church, and the total number of communicants was three hundred and fifty. Within a few years the eight out-stations were multiplied five times, and in forty different

places larger or smaller groups of believers were meeting Sunday by Sunday; while, according to the latest available figures, there are now about two thousand communicants in the district.

Here was a Church which, to begin with, was *self-propagating*. How did these hundreds of believers come to know the Lord? Was it through the preaching of the missionaries? Mason's own statement given in 1920 is as follows:

“During the past six years I have examined for baptism, I suppose, nearly two thousand persons, and only on two occasions, when asking them how they were first led to Jesus, have they said: ‘It was through something *you* said, Pastor.’ The people there have been led to Jesus Christ through the efforts of the Chinese themselves. *That* is the hope of China.”

Men turned to God from idols, the Gospel came to them in power, and then naturally and spontaneously from them sounded out the Word of the Lord throughout the district. It is a common experience of most missionaries to discover close at their doors some who have never even heard the way of salvation. But in Kwangchow the Masons scarcely ever met with heathen who did not know something of the Gospel. The contrast between Christians and non-Christians was so striking that it could not be hid. So manifest was the presence and power of God in their meetings that outsiders

were frequently heard to say, "The living God is in this place."

The Christians were known too by the fact that they were never seen without their bundles, containing a Bible and a hymn book. No one could be a Christian without a book, and all began to learn to read as soon as they had put away idolatry. Many a business man kept an open Bible on his counter which he was constantly reading, and thus it was easy to start a conversation with unbelievers. In fact, the Christians scarcely ever missed an opportunity of testifying. They did not wait to be exhorted, urged, pressed, to bear witness to their Lord. Two or three would meet in a market without any pre-arrangement and hold a meeting on the spot. Mason once passed through a town where an important fair was being held. He decided that it was a good opportunity for preaching the Gospel, for to the end of his life he loved preaching. But as he walked through the fair to choose a vantage ground, he found no less than seven different groups of Christians who, unknown to one another and to him, had heard of the fair and determined to seize the opportunity and make Christ known. Every important event—deaths and funerals especially—was made an occasion for preaching the Gospel.

Whole families turned to the Lord. The men were eager to bring in their women-folk. Indeed,

this was often the reason for the opening of a new centre. Once as a group of men trudged fourteen miles to the city Church on Sunday, they knelt down on the road and prayed, "O Lord, if it takes all this labour for us to go and worship Thee, how can our women-folk be saved?"

At one of the out-stations, on the occasion of the first visit of a foreign missionary lady to their village, the men took charge of the babies and the cooking for three days, so that their women-folk might have an undisturbed opportunity of listening to the missionary visitor and of learning to read the texts of Scripture, and to repeat the hymns she taught them. In several instances husbands gave their wives prizes of money to encourage them to learn to read.

During a New Year campaign a boy walked seventeen miles to procure some Scripture portions. "Why did they not send a man?" asked Mason. "They could not spare the time," said the boy, "they are all preaching." He refused to stay the night in the city because he wanted to hurry back to preach. "Why, can a boy like you preach?" said Mason. "Yes," he replied, "because I love the Lord Jesus."

Here is the story in Mason's own words of a Mr. Yang who died in 1916. Small wonder that the Chinese Church grew when such men were amongst its leaders!



“Every village in China has its bully, and he always has a small army of rascals at his beck and call. Yang of North River Hamlet was the bully of the district, feared by all. In the city he had a relation who was a tax collector, and often did a good turn for him in the district Yamen; but the relative had heard the Gospel and felt the pull of an inward impulse, fastened in his heart by the Holy Spirit, to trust in Jesus and be saved from the wrath to come.

“Now every time he met Yang he warned him of sin’s awful end, and told him how he had found peace in believing in Jesus. Yang felt sorry for his relative, fearing he had been fooled by the foreign missionary. So Yang went deeper and deeper into villainy of every kind—murder, rape, etc.—always able to clear himself and implicate others in the crimes.

“But the story told him by his relative of Jesus dying for the sins of the world was ineffaceable. On his visit to the city of late he had also heard the missionary telling the same wonderful story. Some nights, he has told me, he lay awake all night trying to understand what it all meant. At last the break came, and Yang, under deep conviction of sin, lay on the floor before God beseeching for mercy. Before assurance of salvation came he began to amend his ways, and went round to his erstwhile companions in evil telling them he was saved and done with the business of sin. At first they ridiculed him, but that having no effect, they tied him up, beat him almost to death and rolled him in filth, but nothing moved Yang. He soon became bold in testimony, and everywhere witnessed to his

new-found joy. His old mates continued to ill-treat him for months—spoiling his crops in the field, robbing his home, etc., but in all Yang submitted quietly without complaint. Then the ill-treatment stopped, and Yang was baptised. He opened his home as a chapel, giving up the three best rooms for that purpose, and many souls were born into the Kingdom in those rooms who are to-day bright and shining lights in the Church now established in North River Hamlet.

“ His wife who, in his unregenerate days, Yang had treated cruelly, now seeing his meekness turned in her fury on the quiet husband and was a real thorn in the flesh; but Yang manifested the true spirit of a converted man, and never retaliated.

“ He developed very rapidly in Christian knowledge and grace, and many little chapels were opened near his home. He engaged an extra labourer for the farm in order to be free for Gospel work, and went everywhere preaching free grace and dying love—not a hamlet within walking distance of Yang’s home was left out in his constant itineraries. He gave a plot of land for a chapel, and largely from his own money a place of worship was built, where now are some two hundred believers.

“ During a hot summer he was out preaching, and came home feverish and ill. Typhus developed. In his clear moments his whole mind was on the Church and the Gospel—everybody who came to see him he exhorted to repent and believe. In China when a person is ill every relation *must* pay a visit to the sick-room, and Yang’s life might have been spared if we could have kept him quiet. But he would not desist preaching and

exhorting, and the poor tired body was worn out, but with great joy and fervent expressions of love to the Lord Jesus he went Home as a shock of ripe corn. Scenes at his death-bed were the talk of the whole neighbourhood, and many heathen have since told us of dreams they have had when Yang has come to them and urged them to repent.

“There are ten little Churches in that neighbourhood to-day with, say, a thousand or more attendants, largely through Yang’s ministry.”

But the work was self-propagating largely because it was *self-governing*. If the organisations in all the Churches had been under foreign control greater outward efficiency might have been obtained, but at how great a cost ! Chinese leaders appeared everywhere and developed naturally (or supernaturally) the gifts of the Spirit.

Mason never interfered with the arrangements that were made. He never visited a Church, never even preached, without an invitation. If he saw serious mistakes being made he might offer his advice, but he never insisted upon his suggestions being adopted. Sometimes they were not adopted; but if the event proved that he had been right and the Chinese wrong, they were always ready to come to him with the words, “Well, Pastor, you were right after all.”

In nearly all the out-stations men were appointed as leaders, not because the foreign missionary thought them suitable—still less because a salary

was offered them, for these leaders were all honorary workers—but *because they led*.

The Masons arrived once at an out-station where the people had purchased not one bell, but three bells, to summon the people to worship. The mother Church in Kwangchow possessed a beautiful belfry built in Chinese style as a memorial to Mr. Argento, and the country Christians all believe in having a bell to announce not only the Sunday gatherings, but the daily worship—for every evening all the Christians who lived near enough to the Church premises would assemble with their families for evening prayers. But those three bells were not tuned to be rung simultaneously, and the result was a discord horrible to Western ears. "Tell them how bad it sounds," was the first suggestion. "But the Chinese like it," said Mason, "otherwise they would not do it!" And in all non-essentials that was a principle which settled the matter. "The Chinese like it." Indeed, the Chinese never knew what Mason himself liked, because he was so punctiliously careful to conform to their wishes and ideas, where customs involving no principle of right or wrong were concerned.

Did he fail to gain the respect of the people whom he served with such self-effacement? On the contrary, the Masons were loved and honoured as no autocrat ever could be. When a Church Council

had been appointed in Kwangchow, and the ordination of Chinese pastors was under discussion, someone rose and objected, saying, "What position will Mr. Mason have if there is a pastor in the city and several in the country?" Quickly the answer came, "We will make him our Bishop!"

But if self-government is an inherent right of the Chinese Church, Mason also recognised that *self-support* is its privilege and responsibility. He never engaged the services of a paid helper, though often it would have been a very great help to have someone at hand whom he could consult and who would write his letters. The Chinese leaders all gave their services voluntarily while supporting themselves in various ways. "If the Christians want a full-time worker," he said, "they must support him." He realised that if he or the Mission paid a man's salary, even for one year, the Christians would be quite unable to understand why the money should not be forthcoming every year, and why they should be expected to support a man whose services not they but the missionary had engaged.

The Church buildings were always provided by the people themselves, though Mason would contribute as one of them if he had funds available. Sometimes he was able to help by providing a small harmonium—regarded as almost an essential piece of Church furniture! Mrs. Mason trained a whole

cohort of young people to lead the singing on the harmonium! Believers usually began by meeting in the house of one of their number. Then a special building was felt to be necessary, and money was subscribed. Buildings were often enlarged not merely to accommodate the Christians, still less to provide commodious premises, but in order that there might be room for the heathen to come in and be saved. When Churches were packed with Christians there was no room for outsiders, and the Christians longed to bring them in. Thus the Church was the property of the believers, and became the centre of the community. They developed a sense of ownership, loving their Church as they never could have loved a building erected with foreign money and in foreign style. It is to be noted that in the out-stations collections were only made at the district conferences. The Christians were averse from taking collections on ordinary Sundays, fearing lest outsiders might thus be kept away.

The large Church in Kwangchow, capable of holding over a thousand people, was built mainly by contributions from the people themselves, including the country Christians, who were anxious to have a share in the central Church. It was designed by one of the Christians, and proved to have perfect acoustic properties. A gallery was added to provide further accommodation, but even

under the gallery there was no difficulty in hearing the preacher.

The Christians in city and country alike looked forward with great anticipation to the Annual Conference. Men, women, and children poured into the city by hundreds. The city Church was responsible for providing sleeping accommodation—straw laid down in empty houses—but meals were purchased from vendors who lined the streets with their stalls. Often in the dim light of dawn a thousand people would meet for prayer, and three services were held each day. The building was so packed on these occasions that many were forced to listen in the courtyard, but outside and inside there was a spirit of quiet reverence.

Sometimes special preachers were invited, such as Dr. Jonathan Goforth and Mr. Li Joh-han, a gifted Chinese teacher and evangelist. In 1915 Dr. Goforth was at the last moment prevented by illness from attending, but the meetings proceeded as usual, and God blessed the messages of the Chinese leaders. Elder (now Pastor) Wen in particular preached five times on the text, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Dr. Goforth's visit at the end of the same year was a time of great blessing. Hundreds broke down confessing their sins and failures. The report of what was happening spread through the city, and an outsider was heard to say, "A Mandarin could not

get such confessions, not if he beat a man to death."

A number of demon-possessed men and women were healed, and we give the story of one of them in Mr. Mason's own words:

"In the spring of 1915 a man from a town near by, where we had a small Church, was often brought to our city services hoping to be helped, for he was possessed of 'an unclean demon' who led him to say and do things quite apart from his ordinary inclinations. Prior to the opening of Divine service he would confess his deep desire to worship God reverently, but as soon as the Name of the Lord Jesus was mentioned, or prayer was offered in which the Blood of Jesus Christ was pleaded, the demon caused the man to writhe with contortions that were painful to witness, and to foam at the mouth with copious streams of thick white froth, and to curse the Name of Jesus. In the ancestral home he was constantly breaking up the furniture and chinaware.

"At our Annual Meetings that year Dr. Goforth was with us as a special preacher, and waves of spiritual power passed over the large congregation. This poor man begged that prayer might be made that the power of the enemy in his life be broken. Leading elders with Dr. Goforth and myself took him into an ante-room to pray. After a most awful outburst of cursing, which was broken by spells of yells resembling the roars of animals and fearful convulsions, during which we all feared the man would die, one of the Chinese elders jumped upon the 'possessed' person and, forcing him to the



floor, cried in a very loud voice, 'Unclean demon, I command you in the Name of my Master, Jesus Christ, to come out of this man.' The man immediately arose from the floor with an entirely different look in his face—the same features but transformed. He has been perfectly well ever since."

It will be readily understood that the enemy of souls did not permit this spoiling of his goods to pass unchallenged. Sometimes he was successful in upsetting the work, and it would be wrong to imagine that revival blessing was (or is) continuous in all the forty Churches. The earlier believers especially met with fierce persecution, and sometimes reports of disaster from several of them would reach the city in one day, until Mason in his care of all the Churches felt somewhat as Job must have felt when messengers arrived one after another with evil tidings. But the Kwangchow Christians have learnt to take all their troubles straight to God in prayer, and over and over again their simple faith was rewarded. Once at a place only thirteen miles from the city the Church members were constantly being molested by the village bully, until almost in despair they met together to pray. A passer-by, who happened to look into the Church to see what the Christians were up to, went straight on to the bully's house, and found him suffering from sudden but very violent pain. "No wonder

you are ill," he said, " the Christians are all praying about you." Terrified at this unexpected answer to their prayers, he begged the man to go back again to the Church, and assure the Christians that if only they would stop praying about him he would never persecute them again ! The pain disappeared and he kept his word !

Both before and after their furlough in 1920, the Masons were more than once in great peril through brigands—not the petty bandits of the countryside, but actual armies which, under some notorious leader, are not afraid to attack and plunder city after city. They leave a trail of misery behind them, and carry with them hundreds of captives, who are only released on payment of a huge ransom.

In 1914 one of these notorious brigands, who went by the name of White Wolf, attacked Kwang-chow, and the Masons were saved only through the courage and forethought of the Christians, who found hiding-places for them, first in the city and then in the country, until it was safe for them to return. Seven hundred people were massacred, including six Christians, and this disaster was followed by a year of famine. In their distress the country people were ready to listen to the Gospel message, and there are hundreds of believers who, if asked when they turned to the Lord, would answer, " In the famine year."

Again in 1922 a band of brigands several thousand strong swept across the province, and once more the Masons were forced to take refuge with Christian families in the country, and finally to walk eight days overland to Hankow. Twice in that same year, when danger threatened, it was necessary to leave the city, but on both occasions the Masons and their home were protected from actual injury. Perhaps the most serious loss was the death of Mr. Peter Liu, a young fellow of twenty-nine, greatly used of God as a leader in one of the out-stations. The Church Council had nominated him as an elder in spite of his comparative youth. Brigands swooped down on the little town, the Church was burnt, and he was wounded and left for dead. He lingered for a week, speaking in conscious moments only of the Lord and the progress of the work. Even now tears come to the eyes of the people when his name is mentioned. Two years later another Church was built, but that, too, has since been burnt down, together with many of the Christians' homes.

But through all these experiences the Church continued to grow, and the work was consolidated. Other missionaries joined the Masons at Kwangchow, and Chinese pastors and elders were appointed. Although he did not realise it, the time had now come when God in His wisdom was preparing to promote His servant. For just as his early years,

both in England and China, had been a preparation for Kwangchow, so his whole life was a preparation for that service—surely in an infinitely wider sphere—in which he is now engaged.



## CHAPTER IV

### AFTER KWANGCHOW

WITH his health impaired by the early years of constant itineration in Kansu, and by the heavy load of responsibility which he had borne at Kwangchow, Mason returned to England with Mrs. Mason early in 1925. Some months of rest on the Honan hills and at Hankow had failed to restore him, and it was felt essential for him to have the benefit of the best medical advice. There was no personal farewell between himself and the Kwangchow Christians, and perhaps it was better so, for neither could have borne the sadness of parting. The letter telling of the Masons' return to England caused profound sorrow, and over and over again during the remaining two years of his life Mason received letters from the people begging him to return. "You need do no work," they said. "We will do the work. Only live amongst us and advise us."

But the change, and various methods of treatment suggested in England, brought only temporary relief, and at length in September, 1927, the Doctors advised an immediate operation. Four days later the end came, and on his fifty-sixth birthday his body was laid to rest "Until He come."

And the work? Since the Masons left several hundreds of believers have been baptised. The storm of anti-foreign and anti-Christian propaganda which has swept over China found the Kwangchow Church deeply rooted in God. Missionaries were forced to withdraw and their houses were looted. Ten of the out-station Churches were destroyed, and the big central Church at Kwangchow itself was occupied for more than a year by soldiers and used as a centre of Communistic propaganda. But the Church of Christ has remained steadfast. Many of the Christians have been meeting for worship in their homes, while others were able to meet in a small chapel at the cemetery outside the city. District Conferences have been continued wherever possible. Thus in the summer of 1927 over eight hundred Christians met at the out-station of Peng-chia-tien. The numbers were so great that it was necessary to borrow other premises and hold an overflow meeting.

One of the self-supporting workers, Pastor Ch'en, was called to Higher Service in January, 1928, only four months after Mason's death. His last moments of consciousness were spent in exhorting his relatives to live for God and follow the Lord Jesus. Miss Grace Davey, who was present at Mr. Mason's funeral, representing, as she said, the whole Kwangchow Church, was able to return to Kwangchow with Miss Kreick in November, 1928,

after the soldiers had evacuated the premises. Pastor Wen is now seventy-seven years of age and very feeble, but others are being raised up to take responsibility in the Church. Six Christian women have recently been appointed as members of the Church Council and as a Committee to consult with the missionaries on women's work. There is abundant evidence, as Miss Davey says in a recent letter, that the Lord Himself is truly "Head over all things to the Church."

\* \* \* \* \*

And here this brief, inadequate sketch of a beautiful life and a great work must end. You who have read the story cannot but thank God for him, and pray for the Churches of Kwangchow that his prayers for them may be answered. A fellow-missionary writes: "I can picture him there (at the hill resort in Honan) lying down, far from well, praying whilst the tears fell, so great was the intensity." He speaks of him "poring over his Church register, and praying for those named, remarking, 'The onlooker sees the glamour and progress of this district. I know the dangers and risks and care and sorrow.'"

But if your first impulse is to pray for Kwangchow, the second should be to ask that men and women with the same spirit may be raised up and sent forth to China in this great day of opportunity.



The Chinese of to-day are inclined to be suspicious and critical of the foreigner, but no one with the spirit of Herbert Mason can fail to win their hearts. Generous, large-hearted, sympathetic, always accessible to the people, with strong convictions which, nevertheless, he steadily refrained from forcing upon others, loving the Chinese even as they loved him—if ever the question is asked what type of missionary is needed in China to-day, the answer is ready to hand, “Men like Mason of Kwangchow.”

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